

ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN THE

Pavilion at Downer Landing

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 1881.

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By SAMUEL DOWNER.

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HINGHAM:

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

1881.



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MY FRIENDS:—

This is the fourth time that I have addressed an audience from this humble pulpit, and, I assure you, will be the last; and, being the last, may I crave your kindness and charity in listening to me? I have never uttered here a sentence which I did not believe, and, however humble and soon forgotten, still remains engraved in my deepest thought.

The subject I now propose to address you on is one very deep felt in my soul; it is the result of long and ardent thought, and although, perhaps, I may not agree with any one of you, yet I ask you patiently and charitably to listen. I don't ask your adherence, but I ask your kindly charity. It is a subject that has weighed deeply on my whole life.

Of *infidelity* I never had the slightest touch, but of scepticism, doubt, and anxiety, I feel I have had my full proportion; but long ago they have settled



into a firm conviction. The true conviction of a religious faith is the greatest boon conferred on man by the Creator. It will carry him through the trials and troubles of the thorny paths of this life and land him, at the end of his earthly pilgrimage, happy that he has lived and resigned to give up all of this beautiful world; sure that he sleeps in the bosom of the Father,—the great First Cause, the Good, the Just, the Eternal and Omnipotent, whom it has not been given the eye to see, the ear to hear, nor the imagination of man to understand, and who can only be approached through that Holy Spirit which enlightens every man that cometh into the world, and that inspired Son, fresh from the Eternal, on whom that Spirit has fallen by the inspiration of both to be one with the Eternal Father,—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in One, *that happy One*. But, my friends, while I speak of this Holy One, this Divine Trinity, may be many of you consider, as I believe it, only another phase of infidelity. I only ask your kindly attention,—then think, as you have a right to, what you please, only granting to each other in charity the same privilege.

In that Trinity of the Son I believe the voice of God is personally speaking to us, not only by the



voice of Jesus of Nazareth, the dearest, truest voice, from Him the Father, but of every inspired man whom the Creator has chosen to reveal to us His other truths.

For myself I care little for the alleged miracles. If they do any one good to believe them, let him do so. My own idea is, as science progresses they will be less and less relied upon; but the grand sayings or doctrines are more and more relied upon and will never pass away, — “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” as the first commandment; and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” as the second and equal one; “Do unto others as thou would others should do unto you”; “He that maketh him as least shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven”; and that last prayer of the Son of God on earth, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It is on these doctrines that our present Christian religious system is founded, and our churches, divided as they are into all shades of doctrines, would fall and be but as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, were they eliminated from it. What does science teach us (and what is science in its origin but the divine inspiration of some chosen son of God on that particular revelation)? It teaches us



that we are on the outside of a globe some eight thousand miles in diameter. We may sail round and round it, but we cannot, as yet, explore either its northern or southern boundaries. We have never bored into it one mile from the starting point. Very much of its surface is composed of elements incapable of supporting man, and yet we cannot get off from it. From the mother's womb to the grave-yard, here we must live and here must we die. Science has told us that by the telescope we can discover with almost or quite perfect sureness that there are other worlds, of which the size is so immense that our globe would be as a grain of sand compared to them. We have no knowledge for what purpose they were created. We know not if they are inhabited or not, and, if so, whether they are of a higher or lower development than the man of this earth. We are in entire ignorance. We know nothing of the design of the Creator in creating them; but science almost reveals that the eternal God goes on creating forever and forever, and that all the human mind on this little planet can do is to wonder, love and praise, to study and worship, what He has revealed to us here, and to develop that inspiration which is implanted in every man born to this earth, and to revere the Son



as manifested by the Father, showing itself to us in the revelations of Jesus of Nazareth and of all the other prophets and inspired men whom He has given us.

Here we must live; here we must die, — the spirit, the life of the soul, to take its way to the home which the great Creator has prepared for it; the body to return to the dust, as it was; and the individual to be unknown on earth, henceforth and forever.

When we view these great works of the Creator, let us worship Him, and cultivate that emotion of reverence we, as a nation, are said so much to lack, — that noblest emotion implanted in us. We may keep our individuality, but do not, do not sacrifice our reverence.

I will now give you the words of my text: the two first words of the Lord's prayer, so-called, —

*Matthew, chapter vi., part of verse 9: —*

“OUR FATHER.”

*St. John, chapter i., part of verse 36: —*

“BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD.”

*St. John, chapter i., verse 9: —*

“THAT WAS THE TRUE LIGHT WHICH LIGHTETH EVERY MAN THAT COMETH INTO THE WORLD.”

Here we have the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father we can only know but through the Son



and the Holy Spirit, which lighteth *every man* that cometh into the world, both working together to obtain the highest development of man, on his journey from his birth to the grave. You probably know, as lecturers have very much abounded on the philosophical reasoning of God's way to man, that those horrible disfigurements made by the lowest tribes of man, personifying their God, are but the strivings of their darkened souls to get to Him. It is their highest conception of that worship, and what right have you or I to doubt that, if uttered with their best thoughts as granted by the Creator, it goes up to the throne of Omnipotence and will be as gratefully received as the prayer of Paul, Fenelon or Channing? It is a part of that light which lighteth *every man* that cometh into this world. As Pope says: —

“ Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutored mind  
Sees God in clouds or hears him in the wind.  
His soul proud Science never taught to stray  
Far as the Solar Walk or Milky Way;  
Yet simple Nature to his hope has given,  
Behind the cloud-topped hills, a humbler heaven,—  
Some safer world, in depths of woods embraced,  
Some happier island in the watery waste,—  
Where slaves once more their native land behold,  
No fiends torment, or Christians thirst for gold.  
To be, contents his natural desire;  
He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire,



But thinks admitted to that equal sky  
His faithful dog shall bear him company —”

and so on, through every sect and ism that now governs the world. It is said that the Buddhist has a religion, as taught in the sixth century before Christ, which contains all the beautiful sentiments taught by the Christians of centuries later; but did they ever have a disciple who, whilst suffering under the cruel treatment of a Judean crucifixion, did raise his eyes to his Father, and uttering the gentle cry of love, say, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”? Yet they all had this light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world, and many prayed in their way to the good God with that light which was given them, and surely, surely it was accepted by Him; and so on they exist in all sects in religion and all parties in politics, beloved by the few who know them. They lived by the light which the Creator had implanted in them. We need, O how much we need them, to cultivate this feeling of reverence from them up to the footstool of the all-knowing God.

Before I close this discourse I wish to make a short allusion to the men, the prophets, we have ourselves known. The world is full of like good men. Refer-



ence to them cultivates reverence. To love them while living and to worship their memory when they have passed away makes us better. Let each of us, if reminded of one we have known, and for whom we have experienced this same love and veneration, cultivate a growing reverence for his memory. I will name but three of those whom it has been my happy lot to have been connected with in the closest bonds of intimacy and love: Horace Mann, Samuel G. Howe and Theodore Parker. All of them have left impressions deeply engraved on my heart which will never fade out or be erased. I was happy with them during their lives, and I trust the good seed they have sown may produce, if not ten fold or five fold, at least one fold, and not have been hidden in the ground and produced nothing.

Horace Mann was the most determined martyr I ever knew. With a great moral and intellectual power, and of such vast and comprehensive genius, and with so kind and genial a nature in his home, and with not selfish power enough to look well after his own private concerns, at the age of fifty-six he died of no other disease than the intense overwork of the nervous system. And what a life he achieved. In early life he may have had political ambition. At



any rate, he rose very rapidly in political success and honors; but after the death of his wife he seemed to lose all these aspirations, and it was then he commenced his great labor for the insane and the criminal, and finally succeeded in the great idea of his life, his educational movement, which was embodied in his twelve annual reports. He told me, when he was unanimously nominated to Congress by the Whig and Freesoil party as the successor of John Quincy Adams, that now others could do better than he the work he had laid out for them; that in going to Congress he pledged himself that wherever a blow could be struck against slavery or in favor of temperance he might be relied upon; but as an active politician he should never enter the field. When the time came for a second nomination the Whigs, then a dying party, failed to nominate him, but he was elected by quite a large majority. He took the stump on the only one point, namely: "I have done what I agreed to do when I was first nominated." It was the admiration of the man that triumphantly elected him.

From there he went to Antioch College, where he remained until his decease years afterward. The influence of his character was largely felt there, and



he planted many a good vineyard which is now producing good fruit.

Samuel G. Howe was one of the most kind, good souls that ever existed. His life was a vast field of unselfishness, happy within himself and trying to make all around him also happy. He was deeply impressed with a horror of oppression wherever it existed. For five years he fought in the mountains of Greece and was ever active for the slave; and many owe their freedom to his pass over the underground railroad. I cannot better speak to you of his loving heart and his great work in the cause of humanity than by quoting some lines from Whittier's beautiful tribute to him:

"Would'st know him now? Behold him  
The Cadmus of the blind,  
Giving the dumb lip language,  
The idiot clay a mind;  
Walking his round of duty  
Serenely day by day,  
With the strong man's hand of labor  
And childhood's heart of play."

Theodore Parker was a wonderful man. May be he was not so great a man as Horace Mann, but there was a charm and beauty about his life which made him very dear to those who knew him well. A more



hard-working and studious man never lived, and he had the wonderful power of remembering all he ever saw or ever knew. He had a love of the truth from which there was never any deviation. That he might have had his ideas armed cap-a-pie is quite probable; but a more kind, forgiving nature never existed. His sermon of "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity" might now be preached in any pulpit of the land; but nowhere was it received at the time it was written more ferociously than in the conservative Unitarian fold, to which I then belonged. I have been in the hall of their yearly meeting and heard a leading member say, "Thank God Theodore Parker could leave no dynasty!" If there was one thing more dear to Theodore Parker than another it was that he should be blest with children, and I have heard an eloquent preacher of the conservative Unitarian school, as it was called, exclaim, "Thank God that monsters can not propagate their species!" and this without hardly any opposition from his hearers. But I never left their ranks. I believed I could do more good in my little way remaining. But I have lived to see Theodore Parker's memory as venerated and beloved as it was then frowned upon. I have been to Florence, when my time would not permit me



to even go to Rome and Naples, and picked from over his modest grave violets and brought them home with me, and planted with my own hands flowers over it; and when I left I bowed down my head, and in full communication with my Creator thanked him that he permitted it to fall to my lot to know him as he was and to appreciate the character of a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and showing it by the life he led.

My friends, my feeling has been very fixed that if at the age of twenty-four instead of seventy-four I had come into life with these living notions — no, not notions, but fixed beliefs; if it had found me in the Catholic ranks or the various isms that Protestantism is divided into, I would stay there, trusting to doing more good than to change, and being a rolling stone gathering no moss. There is not a sect but has much of truth in it. It is suited to the various minds that hover around its church. I would endeavor to cull the good that I believed in and treat with kindness that which I might differ from, perfectly indifferent if they called me infidel or Gentile; if they thought so they should do it. But if you cultivate this light which enlighteneth every man who cometh into this world, you are founded on a rock which no storm can



overthrow; and as old age approaches, God will give you the conviction that naught on earth can destroy. Your earthly remains will be gathered to mother earth, your immortal repose in the bosom of the Father.

This world is full of goodness, men and women inspired and full of the Holy Spirit. They are an untold mine of wealth, of joy and of comfort. My friends, it is time I brought this discourse to an end. I thank you for the patience with which you have listened to it. Pursue it to the best of your ability as the Creator may have endowed you and your conscience may direct, and you will achieve happiness.

I will close with a quotation from the great poet Burns, in his address to a young friend, and which every young man should own and read and ponder over:

“And may you better reck the rede  
Than ever did the advisor.”